



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DUCKS DECLINE; MAJOR DECREASES IN TWO MID-CONTINENT FLYWAYS; MODERATE REDUCTIONS ELSEWHERE

Major declines in duck flights in the Mississippi and Central Flyways and moderate decreases in duck flights in the Pacific and Atlantic Flyways were forecast today by the Department of the Interior following the mid-summer survey of waterfowl production by its Fish and Wildlife Service.

The serious mid-continent waterfowl situation has been caused by a drought of major proportions this year in the southern portions of the three prairie provinces in Canada and in the Dakotas. Because most of the birds from this area go to the Central and Mississippi flyways, the effect is being felt more in these flyways than in the two coastal flyways.

This information is based upon waterfowl production surveys just completed by the Service's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife in central and northern Canada and upon information collected by its personnel and cooperators in duck nesting areas in the States and other parts of Canada.

The Service's reports were presented today to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee of the Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife as it began its deliberation about this year's waterfowl regulations. The committee is composed of delegates of the four Flyway Councils, representing the States, and officials of various national conservation organizations. The reports were presented at an open morning meeting of the committee before it went into executive session to discuss recommendations with respect to hunting seasons which will be submitted to the Secretary of the Interior for approval. The decision is expected to be announced August 16.

This is the third year of drought on the prairies. In 1959, the waterfowl crop in the prairie pothole region was largely a failure because of the loss of water areas for nesting birds. There was a considerable recovery in 1960 but it

was still below normal. This year the situation is worse than it was in 1959, the survey crews report. The number of ponds is down 89 per cent from the peak year of 1955. There was a 67% decrease in numbers from last year to this.

When the prairies are dry, the birds are forced northward. This happened in 1959 and again this year. The low ratio of young to adult birds which was recorded in 1959 demonstrated that when birds which ordinarily nest in pothole habitat are forced northward by drought they produce few young. It is expected that this will be the case again this year.

It was also pointed out that declining waters this year especially reduced suitable habitat for overwater nesters. As a result, canvasback, redhead and ruddy ducks and coot are again seriously affected by unfavorable conditions for reproduction.

By flyways, the waterfowl situation and fall flight forecasts are as follows:

Pacific Flyway

Ducks--Production areas with decreases expected to considerably outweigh areas with increases; at least a moderate decrease in the fall flight.

Geese--Small increase in flight of Canada geese; for snow geese, white-fronted geese, cackling geese, about same flights as year ago but larger than 1959.

Brant--Moderate increase.

Coot--Marked reduction.

Central Flyway

Ducks--Minor areas with increases will in no respect balance large decreases in production in major areas; major decrease in fall flight as compared to 1960.

Geese--Flight of all geese same as last year but as compared to 1959, Canadas will be the same, blues and snows somewhat smaller, and white-fronts markedly reduced.

Coot-- Major reduction.

Mississippi Flyway

Ducks--Same picture as Central Flyway; major decline in duck flight as compared to 1960.

Geese--Status of goose populations favorable; flights of Canadas, blues, snows and white-fronted geese about same as in 1960. However, compared to 1959, flights of Canadas, blues and white-fronted geese are expected to be larger with flight of snow geese reduced somewhat.

Coot--Major reduction.

Atlantic Flyway

Ducks--Average duck population still down substantially from levels of 1953-56. All sources of information combined indicate a moderate reduction in fall flight this fall as compared with last year.

Geese and Brant--Fall flight at high level, about the same as 1960 and moderately larger than 1959.

Coot--Major reduction.

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